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Item 8 (e) of the provisional agenda*
**Parallel meetings to review in depth and showcase
progress made and to facilitate peer-to-peer learning in
connection with the sub-themes of the Forum: partnerships
for the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063**

Background report on the sub-theme of partnerships for the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

I. Introduction

1. At a time of heightened geopolitical tensions, fiscal constraints and declining official development assistance, revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development is more critical than ever. Strategic partnerships attract public and private finance, reduce fragmentation, foster South-South and triangular cooperation and create national and regional synergies. Sustainable Development Goal 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development) provides the enabling framework to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, through collective action and accountability.

2. Efforts have been made to diversify development financing through innovative mechanisms, and progress has been made towards operationalizing an African credit rating agency in the private sector. This progress has come on the back of advocacy by the African Union through the African Peer Review Mechanism, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and other regional institutions. In line with the commitments made at the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, there is a strong focus among African Governments on blended finance to de-risk investment in Africa, and on the development of local currency capital markets to shield African economies from currency risks.

3. African countries have continued to make substantive progress on implementing the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, having strengthened trade-related partnerships under Goal 17. By end-2025, all but one of the States members of the African Union had signed the Agreement and all but six had deposited their instruments of ratification. Areas in which progress has been made include the submission of tariff offers, the finalization of rules of origin and the expansion of early trading arrangements, including the Guided Trade Initiative. Although trading with preferences under the Agreement is still limited in scale, such early trading has demonstrated proof of concept for commercially meaningful intra-African trade while also revealing the widespread coordination,

* ECA/RFSD/2026/1/Rev.1.



implementation and trade facilitation challenges that are shaping the trade cooperation agenda of Africa.

4. Technology and innovation are vital if Africa is to achieve its broader development goals. The continent has made progress in establishing digital connectivity, policy frameworks and multi-stakeholder initiatives, but high costs, limited access, skills gaps and uneven infrastructure continue to constrain inclusive digital transformation. Given this situation, stronger partnerships, investment in innovation ecosystems and coordinated collaboration in science, technology and innovation are all the more necessary.

5. Data and statistics are vital for the implementation of the two agendas, since they enable evidence-based policymaking, fruitful resource allocation and accountability. Under Goal 17, the relevant targets pertain to strengthening national data ecosystems, improving the interoperability of administrative, geospatial and survey data, and increasing domestic financing for statistics. Although most African countries have adopted the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals,¹ many targets have not been attained. For example, there is limited funding for national statistical offices, the quality of data is uneven and disaggregated statistics are not produced in a timely manner.

6. The capacity gap is possibly the single most significant internal impediment to the attainment of the two agendas by Africa. There is more to the gap than a mere shortage of financial resources. There are critical deficits in the skills, systems, institutions and processes needed for effective planning, implementation and monitoring. Capacity development institutions in Africa are supporting countries in designing, executing and monitoring development strategies that respond to such complex and interconnected challenges as structural transformation, climate change, demographic dynamics, regional integration and geopolitical uncertainty. Beyond building the capacity of individuals, these institutions contribute to improving the quality of public decision-making and the performance of State and non-State institutions.

7. In the present report, an overview is provided of progress, challenges and opportunities with regard to the achievement of Goal 17 in Africa, with emphasis on finance, technology and innovation, trade, data and statistics, and capacity development. The report includes actionable recommendations to strengthen partnerships and accelerate the implementation of the two agendas and the second 10-year implementation plan (2024–2033) of Agenda 2063² to ensure that no one is left behind.

II. Progress on implementation

A. Finance

8. Africa faces a financing gap of \$1.6 trillion to achieve the two agendas.³ The annual shortfall that African countries face in financing their energy, water and transport infrastructure is about \$170 billion.⁴ This is made all the more difficult by the fact that the global financial architecture is ill suited to addressing the climate

¹ The most up-to-date version of the global indicator framework is available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>.

² African Union, *Decade of Accelerated Implementation: Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan, 2024–2033* (Addis Ababa, 2024).

³ United Nations, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, *Strengthening the National and International Architectures for Financing for Development* (2025).

⁴ African Union Development Agency, “The missing connection: unlocking sustainable infrastructure financing in Africa—a technical white paper” (February 2025).

vulnerability and infrastructure gap that African countries face. Given that the risk of default by African Governments is overstated, they face disproportionately high borrowing costs on Eurobonds (at yields of 7–10 per cent), which has pushed some of those Governments to turn to Asian markets (at yields of 1–3 per cent), while others have issued bonds in national and other African markets (at yields of 6–7 per cent). If African countries are to bridge the gap and achieve the targets of the two agendas, they will need deeper domestic financial markets and such innovative financial mechanisms as blended finance.

9. Foreign direct investment flows into Africa soared by 75 per cent to a record \$97 billion in 2024. Excluding a megaproject in Egypt, inflows still rose by 12 per cent to about \$62 billion, lifting the region's share of global inflows to more than 6 per cent,⁵ driven by investment in renewable energy and urban infrastructure. This momentum was reversed in the first half of 2025: according to preliminary data, inflows to Africa dropped below pre-pandemic levels, falling by 42 per cent to \$28 billion.⁶

10. Africa received \$42 billion in net official development assistance in 2024, with \$36 billion going to sub-Saharan Africa, a slight decline from the previous year.⁷ Donors increasingly prioritized programme-based support and blended financing to mobilize private investment in climate adaptation, health, education and infrastructure.

11. Debt remains a major constraint in Africa, though debt was reduced from 67.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023 to 65.2 per cent of GDP in 2024⁸ and was projected to stabilize below 65 per cent of GDP in 2025 and 2026,⁹ still above pre-pandemic levels. Principal repayments on external debt are projected to exceed \$61 billion in 2025,¹⁰ and interest payments are expected to absorb 27.5 per cent of government revenue, crowding out spending on health, education, infrastructure and climate resilience.¹¹ Worsening debt service-to-exports ratios and a shift towards commercial borrowing is heightening the exposure of the region to market volatility.

12. Despite the improvements they have made, African countries are not mobilizing domestic resources to their full potential. The region had a revenue-to-GDP ratio of 19.8 per cent in 2023¹², with revenue being constrained by narrow tax bases, limited diversification and illicit financial flows of about \$89 billion annually.¹³ Nonetheless, the region significantly reduced the cost of tax collection as a percentage of total tax revenue collected, from 9.5 per cent in 2018 to 1.4 per cent

⁵ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), “Economy investment and finance”, UNCTADstat. Available at <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/datacentre/dataviewer/US.FdiFlowsStock> (accessed on 15 December 2025).

⁶ UNCTAD, “Downturn in global investment persists in early 2025”, Global Investment Trends Monitor, No. 49 (October 2025).

⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Preliminary official development assistance levels in 2024: detailed summary note” (Paris, 2025).

⁸ United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), *Economic Report on Africa 2025: Advancing the Implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area – Proposing Transformative Strategic Actions* (Addis Ababa, 2025).

⁹ African Development Bank, *African Economic Outlook 2025: Making Africa's Capital Work Better for Africa's Development* (Abidjan, 2025).

¹⁰ Ibid.

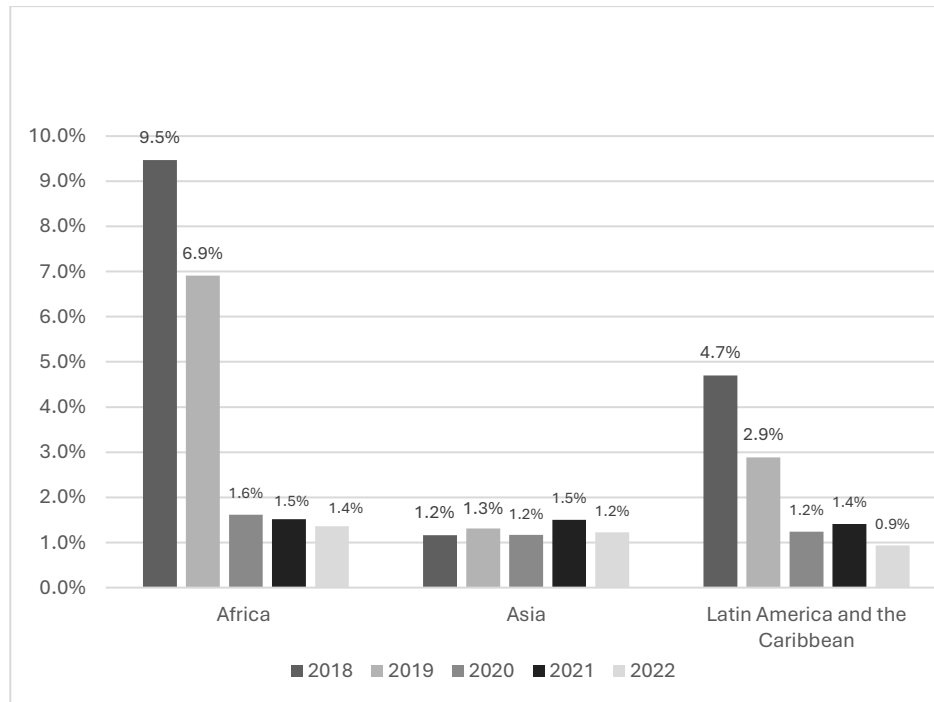
¹¹ African Export-Import Bank, “African debt outlook: a ray of optimism” Market update vol. 3 (21 February 2025).

¹² African Development Bank, *African Economic Outlook 2025*.

¹³ *Economic Development in Africa Report 2020: Tackling Illicit Financial Flows for Sustainable Development in Africa* (United Nations publication, 2020).

in 2022.¹⁴ For countries to expand their fiscal space, they need to implement comprehensive tax reform, formalize the informal sector and digitalize their tax systems, in line with the Sevilla Commitment and its focus on progressive taxation, transparency and innovative financing.

Figure I
Cost of tax collection, by region, 2018–2022
(Percentage)



Source: United Nations, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, *Strengthening the National and International Architectures for Financing for Development* (2025).

13. South-South and triangular cooperation is an important model for blended and innovative finance for development. At the third high-level forum on South-South and triangular cooperation, held in Freetown in 2025, delegates called for deeper African engagement with the global South.¹⁵

B. Trade

14. Progress on operations under the African Continental Free Trade Area continued, despite a volatile global trade environment in which protectionism and geopolitical tensions were increasing and multilateral rules were being weakened. Intra-African trade grew modestly in 2024, with a notable shift towards more diversified, higher value-added products. Intra-African exports reached 15 per cent of total merchandise exports from Africa, well below intracontinental trade levels in Europe and Asia. Trade among African countries proved more resilient than between Africa and the rest of the world, owing to a higher share of manufactured goods, processed food and pharmaceuticals.

¹⁴ United Nations, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, *Strengthening the National and International Architectures for Financing for Development* (2025).

¹⁵ African Peer Review Mechanism, Third Africa High-Level Forum on South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Development, 7 May 2025. Available at <https://aprm.au.int/en/events/2025-05-07/3rd-africa-high-level-forum-south-south-and-triangular-cooperation-sustai>.

15. Manufactured products now account for more than 40 per cent of intra-African exports, and less than 20 per cent of exports from Africa to external partners.¹⁶ This structural shift towards intra-African trade increases the strategic importance of the Area not only as a market-access instrument, but also as a driver of industrialization, regional value chains and economic diversification.

16. To increase the value of intra-African trade flows, the continent is leveraging over 230 special economic zones in 43 countries as nodes for regional production integration.¹⁷ The zones support advanced manufacturing, reduce investment risk through targeted incentives, and provide streamlined facilitation services. Harmonized rules of origin under the Agreement are expected to stimulate intra-African sourcing and cross-border production linkages.

17. Risk-based assessments indicate that more than 70 per cent of African economies remain highly exposed to external shocks, owing to export concentration, commodity dependence and limited fiscal buffers.¹⁸ Since countries with higher shares of intraregional trade exhibit lower export volatility and faster post-shock recovery, the Area plays an important role in enhancing macroeconomic and trade resilience.

18. Digitalization is increasingly shaping the trade agenda of Africa, although progress remains uneven. Only about 17 per cent of exports of services from Africa are delivered digitally, compared with over 50 per cent globally.¹⁹ Cross-border e-commerce remains particularly constrained by gaps in digital payments, logistics and trust frameworks.

C. Science, technology and innovation

19. Mobile network coverage and digital connectivity have increased in Africa, with Internet penetration reaching 36 per cent. Mobile ownership and mobile Internet usage remain low, however, constrained by high costs and affordability gaps. Africa remains the region with the most expensive data-only mobile broadband (5G) services relative to gross national income per capita, at 6.6 per cent in 2025, up from 5.3 per cent in 2024. This compares with a global average of 1.5 per cent in 2025.²⁰ Rural connectivity has been gradually improving, with 4G coverage in rural areas having increased from 49 per cent in 2024 to 57 per cent in 2025, while 3G and 2G access have declined as network operators transition towards newer technologies.²¹

20. To accelerate digital transformation, many countries are implementing the African Digital Transformation Strategy and the Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy. The purpose of the Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy is to integrate artificial intelligence into the goals of Agenda 2063 across such sectors as health, agriculture and public services.

¹⁶ African Union and ECA, *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa (ARIA XI): Delivering on the African Economic Community – towards an African Continental Customs Union and African Continental Common Market* (2025); African Export-Import Bank, *African Trade Report 2025: African Trade in a Changing Global Financial Architecture* (Cairo, 2025).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ African Union and ECA, *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa (ARIA XI); 2024 Trade and Development Report* (United Nations publication, 2024).

¹⁹ *2024 Digital Economy Report: Shaping an Environmentally Sustainable and Inclusive Digital Future* (United Nations publication, 2024).

²⁰ International Telecommunication Union (ITU), *Measuring Digital Development: the Affordability of ICT Services 2024* (Geneva, 2025).

²¹ ITU, “Mobile network coverage”, 2024. Available at <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2024/11/10/ff24-mobile-network-coverage/>; ITU, “Mobile network coverage”, 2025. Available at <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2025/10/15/ff25-mobile-network-coverage/>.

21. The United Nations is advancing digital inclusion through such initiatives as the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries and the Global Digital Compact. The purpose of the Global Digital Compact is to close connectivity gaps, expand access to innovation and ensure that digital transformation benefits all. The adoption of the Compact was a landmark decision that paved the way for lasting progress on worldwide Internet governance and confirmed that the United Nations was firmly committed to creating a connected, inclusive and sustainable digital future for everyone.

22. In addition, the priorities of Africa were fully integrated in the outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society, adopted in December 2025 (A/RES/80/173). In the outcome document, ministers and heads of delegation emphasized that information and communications technologies were a crucial driver of innovation and sustainable development. It further outlined the framework for implementing the Global Digital Compact. The document marked a historic milestone for the architecture of global Internet governance.

23. The outcome document reflects the urgent needs of the international community. The drafters struck a balance between stability and adaptability and sought to safeguard approaches that had proved successful while responding to emerging challenges. Central to this balance was the confirmation of the Internet Governance Forum as a permanent forum of the United Nations. This decision ensures stability by guaranteeing long-term continuity for the multi-stakeholder model while maintaining a flexible framework for cooperation and dialogue, in close alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals. Given the emphasis on collaboration to bridge digital divides, the World Summit is aligned with the Compact.

D. Data and statistics

24. The availability of continental-level data on the Sustainable Development Goals is moderate, but continuity is uneven. Across all country-indicator combinations, between 2015 and 2024, there were three or more observations for 50.1 per cent of combinations, one or two observations for 20.9 per cent of combinations, and no observations for 29.0 per cent of combinations.²² Limited data continuity makes it more difficult to estimate rates of change, identify inflection points and assess whether progress is happening quickly enough for the targets of the 2030 Agenda to be achieved. Data availability is also uneven across countries. Eight countries reported data for at least 200 indicators between 2015 and 2024, while six countries had data for fewer than 150 indicators.

25. The strongest reporting continuity is observed for Goals 7, 6, 15, 2 and 17, in that order. The weakest continuity is observed for Goals 13, 5, 11, 16 and 14, also in that order. Data for these areas is often collected through household and specialized surveys and processed using complex administrative data systems or using measurement approaches that require investment in capacity-building and methodological development.

26. Through its Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys programme, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is strengthening implementation and capacity around household surveys. In 2025, the programme engaged with 23 countries in Africa. Through its comprehensive technical collaboration, UNICEF supports

²² United Nations, ECA, *Africa SDGs Progress Report: Is Africa on Track to Achieve the 2030 Goals?* (Addis Ababa, 2024)

national statistical offices in building sustainable capacity for high-quality, nationally representative data covering at least 40 indicators for the Goals.

E. Capacity development

27. Between 2024 and 2025, the African Union Commission, the African Capacity-Building Foundation and the African Union Development Agency-New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development jointly launched a new round of the Africa Think Tank Platform, in which African research institutions will compete for a series of multi-year grants, each worth up to \$10 million. The purpose of the initiative is to bolster evidence-based policymaking and institutional research capabilities in economic transformation, governance, climate change adaptation, regional trade, food security, human capital development and digitalization. This call represents a large-scale, continent-wide investment in strengthening the operational and analytical capabilities of African think tanks.²³

28. The African Development Institute delivered a planning effectiveness programme in the Central African Republic, Guinea-Bissau, Somalia and South Sudan to help to finalize the creation of tools to align investment in capacity-building with national development plans, thereby increasing the effectiveness of implementation and the national ownership of development programming.

29. Under its 2023–2025 strategy, the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity-Building in Africa expanded its reach and, by doing so, achieved a record increase in revenue in 2024. This enabled the Institute to scale up projects on girls' education, safe learning environments, mental health support and digital skills training for teachers in many African countries.

30. The African Institute for Economic Development and Planning launched its flagship Integrated Development Planning programme in 2025. The programme was designed and delivered in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, the secretariat of the African Peer Review Mechanism, academia and national planning institutions to strengthen national capacities for the planning, financing, implementation and monitoring of development strategies aligned with the two agendas. Of the 1,486 people who enrolled, 689 (including 140 women) from 43 members of ECA successfully completed the training.

31. The Government of Ethiopia created the Digital Ethiopia 2030 strategy to promote capacity development and digital literacy in the public sector and to expand infrastructure and innovation. Similarly, the 2025 edition of Industrial Skills Week Africa, organized in Zambia by the African Union Development Agency and the Government, brought together regional policymakers, practitioners and educators to align workforce development with industrial transformation goals.

²³ African Union, "The African Union Commission (AUC), African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) and AUDA-NEPAD, has successfully launched the Africa Think Tank Platform Call for Proposals", 24 July 2025.

III. Good practices and solutions

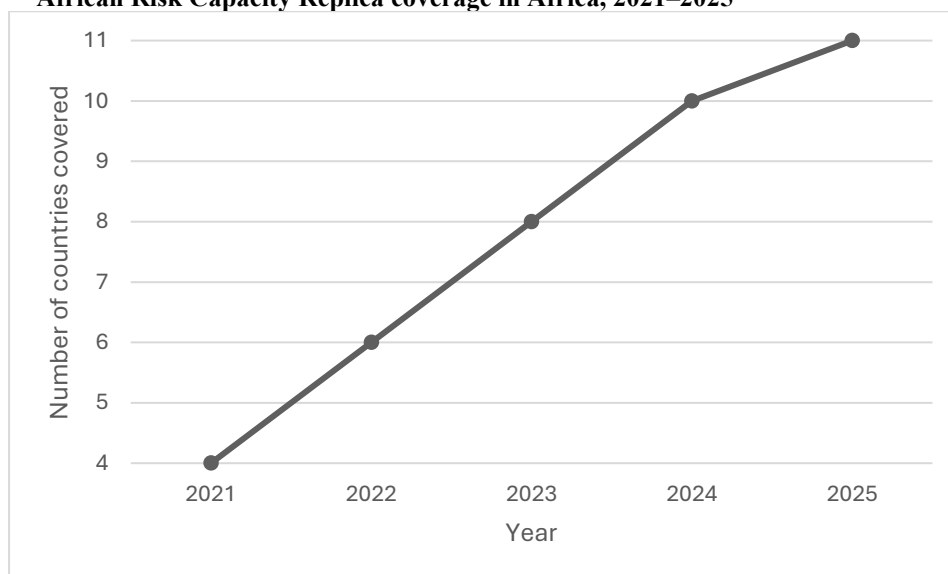
A. Finance

32. The African Union is making progress on a coordinated continental response to the debt challenges faced by Africa, centred on stronger debt transparency, sound debt management and reforms to the global debt architecture. These commitments were reaffirmed at the Conference on Debt in Lomé, at which the participants adopted a declaration as an outcome of the Conference in which they committed themselves to adopting an African common position on debt as a negotiation strategy for the continent. To complement this framework, the Sustainable Debt Coalition is promoting reforms and innovative instruments, including debt-for-climate and debt-for-nature swaps and climate-resilient debt clauses.

33. The World Food Programme has strengthened multi-stakeholder partnerships across Africa, collaborating with governments, the African Union, the United Nations, financial institutions and civil society to improve food security, nutrition, climate resilience and social protection. The World Food Programme has improved policy coherence, mobilized resources and expanded anticipatory action, climate-responsive social protection and digital early-warning tools while leveraging innovative financing, including insurance from the African Risk Capacity group, which provided \$80 million for 2.5 million people in 11 countries²⁴ and enabled rapid payouts after climate shocks, including \$3.1 million for Mozambique after Cyclone Chido.²⁵

Figure II

African Risk Capacity Replica coverage in Africa, 2021–2025



Source: World Food Programme, “Safeguarding food security and building resilience: an overview of WFP-supported disaster risk financing programmes” (forthcoming).

²⁴ See the World Food Programme annual country reports for Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, the Niger, Senegal, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe for 2024 at www.wfp.org/annual-country-reports-2024.

²⁵ Natasha Dsouza and others, “Payouts from WFP-supported disaster risk financing programmes”, World Food Programme, 11 July 2025.

B. Trade

34. Early experience in implementing the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area has revealed several practices that effectively strengthen trade-related partnerships under Goal 17. The shift in intra-African trade towards manufactured goods, processed food and pharmaceuticals shows the value of regional markets for industrial upgrading and economic diversification. This pattern has contributed to greater trade resilience, as intra-African trade has proved more stable than trade with external partners during periods of global volatility.

35. The strategic use of special economic zones has emerged as a practical mechanism for operationalizing regional value chains. The combination of targeted fiscal incentives, integrated supply chains and streamlined regulatory services in these zones helps to reduce transaction costs and support cross-border production networks that are aligned with preferences, as defined in the Agreement. Harmonized rules of origin support this approach by encouraging intra-African sourcing and deeper production linkages across countries.

36. Economies with higher shares of intraregional trade exhibit lower exposure to external shocks and faster post-shock recovery, highlighting regional integration as a resilience-enhancing strategy beyond its trade liberalization effects. Meanwhile, emerging cooperation on digital trade offers scalable solutions for lowering trade costs and expanding participation, in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises. Progress in the coherent regulation of electronic transactions, digital payments and digital customs systems has shown potential to improve trade facilitation, reduce information asymmetry and strengthen technology-enabled partnerships across borders.

C. Science, technology and innovation

37. Some of the continental initiatives launched by ECA and its stakeholders to build collaborative knowledge and innovation platforms include the Alliance for Entrepreneurial Universities in Africa, Origin Research and Innovation Labs and the African Biomedical Engineering Consortium. These initiatives have grown considerably. The Alliance for Entrepreneurial Universities in Africa, for example, has about 50 formal members, about 1.1 million students and over 70,000 researchers who share the goal of transforming their institutions into hubs for product and enterprise development that create jobs and grow the economy. Origin Research and Innovation Labs, for its part, has become a hub for solving challenges in Africa through the combination of Indigenous and high-technology know-how, thus meeting local needs and acting as a vehicle for diaspora engagement in research and development in Africa.

D. Data and statistics

38. In 2025, the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems, in partnership with ECA, the African Development Bank and UNICEF, launched a systems improvement framework to strengthen the programme, with a view to closing the birth registration gap.

39. In an assessment of data availability for selected Goal 17 indicators, it was revealed that reporting was generally strong in Africa, but that there were also large structural gaps. ECA conducted an analysis in which it found that improvements since 2017 seemed to have been driven primarily by gains in data infrastructure and data products, while progress in data use and services had been more gradual.²⁶ These

²⁶ United Nations, ECA, *Africa SDGs Progress Report*.

findings made it even clearer that partnerships were needed that would strengthen the production and the effective use of data.

40. South-South and triangular cooperation have strengthened the implementation of Goal 17 through peer learning in census operations, administrative data systems, national statistical planning and monitoring of the Goals. ECA, through the regional initiatives it has coordinated in collaboration with the African Union Commission and development partners, has facilitated the exchange of experience and supported institutional convergence across countries.

E. Capacity development

41. One of the most effective practices in capacity development has been the adoption of demand-driven and country-embedded activities alongside continental initiatives. Initiatives that are anchored in requests from Governments and aligned with national development plans have led to higher ownership and policy uptake. For instance, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the African Peer Review Mechanism have collaborated over the past five years to support countries in their efforts to implement the two agendas.²⁷

42. A second good practice is the shift towards integrated and systems-based learning. Cross-sectoral programmes linking macroeconomic policy, industrial development, social policy, climate resilience and territorial development, have proved better suited to addressing the complex policy challenges faced by African policymakers than traditional silo-based training approaches. Integrated development planning courses and executive programmes have enabled officials to better coordinate policies across ministries, thereby reducing fragmentation and improving policy coherence. Recent ECA support for national planning institutions, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme, the Development Coordination Office and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, is illustrative of such an approach. The support combined training with policy dialogues and advisory services to strengthen planning systems.

43. Volunteerism contributes to addressing capacity gaps. Globally, 34.5 per cent of working-age people (2.1 billion people) engage in volunteer work every month. In Africa, this percentage rises to 58.5 per cent, the highest of any global region.²⁸

44. The African Capacity Building Foundation has empowered the Centre for Inclusive Climate Change Adaptation for a Sustainable Africa to integrate gender-responsive, inclusive approaches across climate policy and action. Through training in leadership, proposal development and inclusive procurement, trainees have acquired skills that improve their organizational performance and their ability to secure funding for future climate-adaptation work.

45. The World Food Programme collaborated with the African Development Bank to mobilize \$76 million during the period 2022–2024 to fund an emergency wheat programme in the Sudan. The wheat programme supported over 300,000 farmers, improving their self-sufficiency. The value of the wheat produced under the programme was estimated at \$187 million (a return 2.5 times greater than the initial investment), and reduced the reliance of countries on imports. This demonstrates the role of scalable development finance models in transforming food systems.²⁹

²⁷ African Peer Review Mechanism and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Assessment of policy coherence for accelerating sustainable development and Agenda 2063 in Africa” (Midrand, 2025).

²⁸ United Nations Volunteers, *2026 State of the World’s Volunteerism Report: Volunteerism and its Measurements* (Bonn, 2025).

²⁹ African Development Bank, “Sudan Emergency Wheat Production Project (SEWPP)” (29 May 2025). Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-emergency-wheat-production-project-sewpp>.

46. Since the United Nations Food Systems Summit was held in 2021, countries have increasingly prioritized interministerial coordination and cross-sector collaboration to accelerate 2030 Agenda implementation. Through such endeavours as the Convergence Initiative³⁰ and the Scalable Success Model Project,³¹ the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub is supporting governments in strengthening or establishing interministerial bodies, enabling policies and incentives for whole-of-government action. Over 40 African countries have appointed national food systems convenors to drive cohesive national reforms, and several countries carried out institutional restructuring in 2025.

IV. Challenges and emerging issues in implementation

A. Finance

47. Structural problems and systemic biases make it difficult for African countries to gain access to finance. Inflated risk perceptions raise borrowing costs for African countries, and global credit-rating agencies often overlook Africa-specific conditions, producing ratings that misrepresent actual default risk. The situation forces African countries to rely on costly commercial debt and limits investment, and the high level of debt service paid by African countries further constrains their fiscal space. Weak domestic resource mobilization and underdeveloped capital markets compound the constraints.

48. Commercial debt represents over 54 per cent of external debt,³² heightening exposure to market volatility and currency risks. Since climate finance gaps and global economic shocks exacerbate vulnerabilities, mechanisms are needed in which systemic biases have been corrected so that the true creditworthiness of African countries is better reflected.

49. The African Union, in developing an African credit rating agency with ECA support, wishes to offer more accurate risk assessments. It remains essential to expand innovative financing, including blended finance, blue and green bonds, public-private partnerships, social impact funds and concessional financing to ensure that growth is both resilient and sustainable.

B. Trade

50. Despite the progress made, significant challenges continue to constrain the effectiveness of trade-related partnerships under Goal 17. Non-tariff barriers remain a major obstacle, increasing intra-African trade costs by 30–40 per cent in some corridors. Fragmented regulatory frameworks, uneven implementation capacity and limited coordination across institutions will prevent Africa from fully benefitting from the advantages of the African Continental Free Trade Area.

51. Digital gaps represent an increasingly binding constraint. Limited broadband penetration, high data costs, weak cross-border interoperability and fragmented digital regulations restrict the ability of firms to participate effectively in digital trade. These constraints disproportionately affect small and medium-sized enterprises and amplify vulnerability to external shocks, especially climate-related disruptions and supply-chain interruptions.

³⁰ See <https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/hub-solution/convergence-initiative/en>.

³¹ See <https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/hub-solution/scalable-success-model/en>.

³² African Export-Import Bank, “State of play of debt burden in Africa 2024: debt dynamics and mounting vulnerability” (Cairo, 2024).

52. Trade structure remains highly exposed to global uncertainty. Heightened trade policy fragmentation, tighter financial conditions and recurrent geopolitical and climate-related shocks have intensified transmission risks to export revenues, in particular for economies with narrow export bases and limited policy space. Although external trade partnerships are expanding, they could lead to further fragmentation if they are not aligned with the development objectives for regional value chains. Persistent trade-finance gaps further constrain participation, limiting the potential to scale up intra-African trade despite preferential market access.

C. Science, technology and innovation

53. The benefits of digital transformation are not equitably distributed. Such structural barriers as inadequate digital infrastructure, low levels of digital literacy, policy fragmentation and limited access to finance and technology persist. A widening digital divide within and among countries and regions will exacerbate existing inequality unless deliberate strategies are pursued to ensure inclusion and equity.

54. Many countries have not fully benefited from the rapid development of the digital economy, often because of a weak skills base and a lack of appropriate infrastructure: only 38 per cent of people in Africa have Internet access, and only one African in four has acquired basic information and communications technology skills.³³

D. Data and statistics

55. The scaling down of the Demographic and Health Surveys Program in 2025, following the withdrawal of support from the United States Agency for International Development, will undermine the ability of Governments to monitor progress on many indicators that are needed for the development of evidence-based policies.³⁴ It will be essential to strengthen the capacity of countries to conduct national household surveys and to expand existing survey programmes in order to counter the negative impact that the scaling down of the Demographic and Health Surveys Program will have on data availability.

56. Africa has made tangible progress in establishing the institutional and partnership foundations required under Goal 17. In parallel, persistent gaps in legislative alignment, financing for sustainability, and reporting completeness indicate the need for renewed, better-coordinated partnerships to strengthen national statistical systems as a public good.

E. Capacity development

57. Many capacity development initiatives remain project-based or donor-driven, resulting in duplication, inconsistent quality and limited alignment with national development priorities. This fragmentation often reduces the sustainability of outcomes and weakens institutional ownership.

58. Several initiatives depend on short-term or external funding, which limits long-term planning, continuity and the expansion of programmes. This creates

³³ ITU, *Measuring Digital Development*.

³⁴ Joseph Molitoris, Vladimira Kantorová and Patrick Gerland, “Assessing the impact of the loss of the Demographic and Health Surveys on global population and family planning data and estimates and on population research”, Population Division, Technical Paper No. UN DESA/POP/2025/TP/No.10 (November 2025).

uncertainty for both providers and beneficiaries and constrains strategic investment in innovative programme design.

59. Emerging issues include the need for future-ready skills, especially in the areas of digital transformation, climate adaptation and inclusive economic planning.

60. Persistent challenges include limited financial and institutional resources for volunteering, low prioritization of volunteering in development policies and strategies, and a paucity of robust, reliable data and knowledge on volunteerism.³⁵

V. Main messages and recommendations

A. Finance

61. Strengthening the financing architecture is essential for African countries to make progress on the two agendas. This strengthening can be achieved, through a number of avenues: the expansion of local currency financing reduces a country's reliance on volatile external funding and boosts macroeconomic stability; the growth of domestic debt markets – through credible and liquid local bond markets, better market infrastructure, and greater participation from institutional investors – lowers borrowing costs and diversifies the investor base; the harmonization of trading standards across the region enhances market depth; collaboration with multilateral and regional institutions to design hedging tools and build technical capacity mitigates currency risks; digital retail investment platforms broaden access and strengthen financial inclusion.

62. Exploring opportunities to attract private investment and blended finance through regional mechanisms and innovative instruments could significantly enhance the development financing landscape of Africa. Operationalizing an African credit rating agency could dampen systemic biases in global credit assessments, reduce borrowing costs and improve investor confidence. National platforms for blended finance, aligned with the platform for action on private investment mobilization launched by ECA, offer pathways to coordinate public-private partnerships and de-risk investment in climate-resilient infrastructure, renewable energy and digital transformation. In addition, multilateral development banks should expand their lending capacity and facilitate the raising of private capital, in line with the ambition expressed in the Sevilla Commitment for development financing to be scaled up.

63. Blended finance and local currency capital markets are viable solutions to improve access to finance in Africa. These mechanisms should be supported by realistic assessments of sovereign creditworthiness to overcome the bias reflected in the sovereign credit ratings by international credit rating agencies.

64. Innovative financing, anticipatory action and data-driven cooperation are essential to strengthen cross-sector policy coherence and build long-term resilience in order to minimize the human and economic toll of climate shocks.

65. The transformation of food systems can accelerate the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area by improving food security, climate resilience, biodiversity and health. Countries need strong interministerial coordination, inclusive partnerships with farmers, women, young people and Indigenous people, and robust accountability mechanisms. Blended approaches and private capital must be leveraged to close gaps in financing, and global and regional support should provide policy coherence, capacity-building, technology transfer and knowledge-sharing to bolster country-led pathways.

³⁵ African Union, *State of Volunteerism in Africa Report* (2025).

B. Trade

66. Accelerating the implementation of the Agreement is central to efforts to translate trade partnerships under Goal 17 into resilient, value added growth, in particular through the reduction of non-tariff barriers, the scaling up of trade facilitation and the strengthening of digital trade systems.

67. External trade partnerships should strengthen regional value chains and productive capacity, ensuring that the integration path of Africa supports diversification, resilience and long-term development.

68. For steps to achieve Goal 17 to be effective, members of ECA must invest not only in market-access reforms, but also in the data, institutions and partnerships needed to translate trade commitments into measurable development outcomes.

C. Science, technology and innovation

69. Members of ECA need to invest in research and development, bridge the digital divide and support innovation hubs, incubators and accelerators and university-industry partnerships. They also need to promote technology transfer through public-private partnerships and broaden and deepen South-South cooperation.

70. In the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2034 and related regional harmonization instruments, there should be greater emphasis on strengthening collaboration with universities and research and development organizations on science, technology and innovation across all related Sustainable Development Goal priorities to leverage and scale up innovative solutions using existing resources.

D. Data and statistics

71. Continental development bodies should institutionalize South-South and triangular cooperation by strengthening dedicated regional platforms on data and statistics.

72. Members of ECA should strengthen their national administrative data and statistical systems – including their civil registration and vital statistics systems – to protect people’s legal identity, inform decision-making and ensure that no one is left behind. The steps they should take include the production of disaggregated data. Countries should transition from conducting periodic surveys to creating digitalized administrative systems by eliminating silos and should secure sustained domestic financing to strengthen national statistical and data systems.

73. Members of ECA should invest in data infrastructure and emerging technologies, treating data systems as critical public infrastructure, to bridge the global data divide through the integration of emerging data sources into official statistics. Substantial investment in capacity-building is critical to enable national statistical offices to leverage advanced analytics and predictive modelling.

E. Capacity development

74. Members of ECA should use integrated, demand-driven, institution-focused approaches to capacity development, in line with country-level and regional priorities. Stronger partnerships and embedding efforts in reforms – using blended and digital learning – will improve planning, policy coherence and implementation capacity while ensuring sustainable, relevant outcomes.

75. Capacity development efforts should be focused on building a future-ready workforce and resilient public institutions that are equipped to address complex development challenges. The emphasis of programmes should be on integrated planning, regional integration, climate resilience, digital transformation and change management.

76. The African Union Commission and members of ECA should equip voluntary organizations with the resources to contribute to the implementation of the two agendas, integrate volunteerism into statistical measurements, and enhance advocacy of national volunteer programmes to optimize contributions and improve data collection.³⁶

³⁶ Ibid.